

A powerful song in a time of fear

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Like many others, I have lived the last few weeks from one devastating news event to the next, aching for the people lost and left hurting from mass shootings, trying to imagine myself into the shoes of refugees and those caught in the Syrian War, letting the pain of Paris, San Bernardino, Colorado Springs, and the U.S. presidential campaign compound my sense of the world's terrors, wondering if I can do something to stop the madness.

But while these thoughts have been in my head, I encountered, or re-encountered, a powerful song. This summer I was a teacher at the [Kenyon Institute's Beyond Walls](#) summer workshop in spiritual writing. One evening, [Rabbi Jamie Arnold](#) organized a song circle. We went around the table and each person proposed a song for the group to sing. We sang "House of the Rising Sun," "Where Have All the Flowers Gone," and "Amazing Grace," along with several Jewish and Hebrew songs that weren't as familiar to me.

The most moving song of all was offered by Rabbi Rachel Barenblat. In English, it is called "All the world is a very narrow bridge." The simple, repeated lyrics go, "All the world is a very narrow bridge / the important thing is not to be afraid." The quotation comes from an 18th-century Ukrainian rabbi named [Reb Nachman](#). [Here's](#) the [Hava Nagilla Band](#) performing its rousing rhythms.

Rabbi Rachel, who blogs at the [Velveteen Rabbi](#), recently discovered something new about this song:

I learned the lyric as ללכ דחפל אל—"the important thing is] not to fear at all." But it turns out that the original song lyric is different. In place of דחפל (to fear) it says דחפתהל, which is a reflexive verb; it means something like to make oneself afraid, to "fear-ify" oneself. The important thing is not to make oneself afraid, not to live in a constant state of fear, not to act and

think and make choices from a place of fear.

This strikes me as a critical reminder for us at this moment. Let's not fear-ify ourselves. Yes, the world is a very narrow bridge, but the greatest risk of all maybe be hiding in isolation.